

# CURRENTS INTERVIEW: WALTER MARTIN

*Christianity's cult-watcher discusses Adventism in trouble — including his fear that SDA leaders “are on Masada and they don’t know it.”*

In the mid 1950s, a theologian and cult-watcher named Walter L. Martin began an investigation into Seventh-day Adventism which led the church to publish the book *QUESTIONS ON DOCTRINE* and which led Martin to write *THE TRUTH ABOUT SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM*. In his book and the articles that preceded it, Martin holds that Adventists are not a cult, subscribing to extrabiblical authority, but are in fact biblical—and thus genuine Christian brethren, worthy of respect and unreserved fellowship. During an interview in February 1983, Martin told *CURRENTS* his feelings regarding the fate of *QUESTIONS ON DOCTRINE* and gave his evaluation of SDA theological developments subsequent to 1955.

Because nearly three decades have passed since Martin spent hundreds of hours in dialogue with General Conference officers, we expected to interview an unsteady octogenarian. But Martin is barely into his fifties.

He was a mere boy when he confronted

FREDA, an acronym given by some on Eastern Avenue to Froom, Read, and Anderson. L.E. Froom, whom Martin had asked to meet, was Adventism's reigning historian-apologist. W.E. Read, General Conference field-secretary, entered the discussions at Froom's suggestion. And Roy Allan Anderson, also included at Froom's request, was Ministerial Association secretary and *MINISTRY* Magazine editor.

Martin was already a contributing editor for *ETERNITY* Magazine and had published a book exposing the cults (his life's cynosure) when he persuaded his mentor-boss, *ETERNITY* editor Donald Grey Barnhouse, to join him in conversation with his new friends from the General Conference.

General Conference president R.R. Figuhr gave his blessing to the meetings in the summer of 1955 and more than once after his retirement told R.A. Anderson that the book *SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS ANSWER QUESTIONS ON DOCTRINE*, which resulted directly from the discussions with Martin and Barnhouse, was the most

meaningful accomplishment of his administration. Not everyone agreed, however; and evidence of the sound and fury that followed publication of *QUESTIONS ON DOCTRINE* is illustrated in a box on page 22.

Dr. Martin was interviewed at his Christian Research Institute offices in El Toro, California, where he employs an engaging staff of research assistants.

Martin has invested much of himself in Seventh-day Adventism, and his reputation with the evangelical Christian community is on the line as he maintains that Adventists are Christian brethren rather than a cult. Consequently, he remains intensely interested in the status of our internal doctrinal debates.

When discussing his interaction with Seventh-day Adventist leaders past and present, Martin becomes very much involved. Interview becomes monologue. And, given the continuing vicissitudes in Adventist doctrine and policy, Adventists can expect to hear more from this self-appointed monitor of cults.

**CURRENTS:** I understand that you have recently solicited from the General Conference President, Neal Wilson, a statement affirming the validity of Adventist doctrine as presented in the 1957 publication, *Sev-*

*enth-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*. Could you tell us why you are looking for such a statement at this time from the General Conference president? Have you received any response?

**MARTIN:** The request has been sent to Mr. Wilson. The reason for it is because increasingly, over the last few years, I have met Adventist pastors, teachers, and evangelists around the country who felt that the de-



"They were to take my book and get it into all the Adventist bookstores and publishing houses . . . They reneged on that. The General Conference reneged on that, and [R.A.] Anderson was very upset."



"I believe Ellen White had an extremely complex personality, and I think she plagiarized materials because she believed that the Lord had shown her that what the sources said was the truth . . ."



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID S. BAKER

"They are on Masada and they don't know it. If Ellen White is an infallible interpreter of Scripture, then what they've railed against all these years has finally come to pass . . . They have a pope."

nomination had taken such a powerful stand in *Questions on Doctrine*, with such good scholarship behind them—amassing some of the best brains they had at the time—and really trying to come to grips with the issues which were facing their denomination and separating them from fellowship with other evangelicals. And they could not understand why there was a muffling of the book, why it was taken out of circulation; many felt that I was being misled. The men who dealt with me dealt with me in integrity and in honor, and I believe that. But afterwards, a “Pharaoh arose who knew not Joseph.” And as a result of that, the “old guard”—some of whom followed the school of Uriah Smith on Christology, M.L. Andreason on sanctuary doctrine, and some of Mrs. White’s earlier unfortunate statements (which need not be defended as infallible)—were in a position



T.E. UNRUH

to influence the publication of the book and the continued dialogue with evangelicals on which it was based. After 150,000 copies, *Questions on Doctrine* was permitted to go out of print. That was a bad mistake. It was a very popular book.

**CURRENTS:** “Permitted” as euphemism here?

**MARTIN:** I am being kind. I believe it was deliberately removed by people who felt that it was a thorn in their theological flesh.

**CURRENTS:** Maybe we ought to flash back about 30 years to the time when, as a young graduate student studying the history of American religions at New York University, you first initiated contact with the General Conference brethren. T.E. Unruh, one of the men you met, said, “This first meeting can be described as a confrontation.” You had already written about Adventists, perhaps negatively, in a book called *The Rise of the Cults*. What occasion did you have to contact the Adventist leadership, and how do you remember the initial confrontation?

**MARTIN:** Well, I received literature critical of the position I had taken in *The Rise of the Cults*, where I listed Adventism as a cult.

T.E. Unruh contacted me in Reading, Pennsylvania, where I believe he was a Conference president or had some official position there. He was a very winsome and loving man. But he was quite upset by the fact that I had taken this very strong position, that so many people read my material, and that Adventism would suffer as a result—unjustly, he felt. We had a confrontation, which was the best thing. I said to him that I had a considerable amount of evidence from Adventist publications which are heretical. I said, “It does not have anything to do with like or dislike of Adventists as people, or their accomplishments, or their zeal—the cults are very accomplished; they are very zealous. I can introduce you to marvelous Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses who are moral, ethical, tithe-giving people who imitate Christian ethics and Christian morality. The fact that you do these things doesn’t make you a Christian. What makes you a Christian is whether or not you really are in accord with biblical theology and whether you know Jesus Christ as your Saviour.”

“Well, I do,” said Unruh.

Then I said, “I am not challenging you, but your literature is a hodge-podge of contradictions. I am a logician. I am a student of comparative religions, and I intend to make it my life work. I collect data. I am a documentary research man.”

“Well,” Unruh said, “I propose we have some dialogue in this matter and talk about this.”

And I said, “All right. I will talk with Dr. Barnhouse of *Eternity Magazine* (I was contributing editor at the time); and if he is interested, we could make this a joint project with the General Conference and the Evangelical Foundation. We will discuss, we will go into dialogue, and I’ll be happy to represent the Foundation. And if my position is in error, I’ll be happy to correct it. If it is not in error, then you will sustain that what I have said is true.”

**CURRENTS:** Were you under contract by Zondervan at that time to write another book?

**MARTIN:** No. In fact, the General Conference was not really too warm to the entire project initially. Anderson, Froom, Read and Unruh paid some of the expenses from their own pockets. And we, out of our own pockets, did the same thing, because I came to the realization that there was a real area of conflict that had to be resolved. After all, if Seventh-day Adventists were in essence Christians, then to classify them as a cult would be a great sin. If they were really cultists, and didn’t even know that they were, then we could do them a great service by pointing it out to them. And if we could deal with all of the issues that had been raised from the Adventists’ controversies of Can-right, all the way through to that particular day, then perhaps we could set the record straight once and for all. Just exactly what did they believe?

You have to understand that 30 years ago

there was great confusion. As a matter of fact, today there still is in many areas of



R.R. FIGUHR

Adventism. They had strains of Arian Christology; there were men in positions of authority who denied the deity of Christ and the Trinity. For all I know, some of them may still be there today. There were people who were absolute legalists, who believed that any person who kept Sunday—even in good conscience before God—right at that moment had the mark of the beast. And they were printing and distributing it under official Adventist logos.

**CURRENTS:** Can you put a handle on the copiousness of that discussion and how long it went on?

**MARTIN:** What you really have to understand is that when we first decided we would explore this, Barnhouse wouldn’t buy it. He and the General Conference had a complete agreement: they were anathema. Barnhouse, you see, had come out against Adventism so strongly in the past and had such a vast ministry of influence that it was unthinkable for him to even consider these people from Mountain View, California, who had stamped him with the mark of the beast. He ran into some of the Adventist “lunatic fringe.” And, of course, that turned him off, as it would turn off any normal person. So, Barnhouse said, “No. We won’t go into it.”

The General Conference would say (I learned later), “This Martin, how can we really trust him? Look what he has done to the Jehovah’s Witnesses and to the Mormons. He’ll come after us. If we let him in, if we open anything up to him, who knows what he will say?”

So, Roy Anderson said to them and the others, “He is a man of integrity, and we believe he will tell the truth. If we tell him the truth, and we don’t hold anything back, he will tell the truth. We will break down the walls that separate fellowship between evangelicals and Adventists all over the world. We will begin something that will go on and

on in the denomination, that will help people understand that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We can perform such a great service if we are willing to take the risk."

To his eternal credit, Reuben Figuhr said, "We will take the risk." So they financed the conferences in Washington, and Barnhouse financed our part of whatever we had to do in Philadelphia or wherever we went.

**CURRENTS:** You are talking about hundreds of hours of contact.

**MARTIN:** Ha! You are talking thousands of hours of research. What I did was, I went and collected every bit of information from Adventist publishing houses in the basic areas of doctrine covered in the book, *Questions on Doctrine*. Do you have any idea how much time that took? Do you have any idea how much time it took to read the material? I didn't have a research staff (I have 20 people now). It was George Cannon and I, with some of the other people I could trust, who had good theological orientation to check out the material.

After I started doing the research, I saw definite division in Adventist theology. There were the people who really were believers and held to the foundations of the Gospel. Then there were those who were downright legalists—worshippers of Ellen White—who had exalted her beyond the role that she ever claimed for herself, and, in effect, were the loud voice that the evangelical world was always hearing. They were hardly ever hearing the conservative Adventists. They were hearing these people who were stamping [them] with the mark of the beast and telling them that the atonement wasn't finished and all kinds of other things.

So I distilled all this information over a period of months. I mean months and months and months of just checking it. I had carte blanche to go ahead as soon as Barnhouse was convinced. And I convinced Barnhouse by sitting down with him and saying, "You taught me that the unity of the body of Christ was the primary task of Christians and that we were to maintain that unity."

He said, "Correct."

I said, "Now, if these people are members of the body of Christ and we treat them as enemies, God can't bless us."

And he said, "That's true."

And I said, "Let's find out (let me find out). Do you trust me?"

"Absolutely," he said. I said, "Then let me find out." He said, "Do it."

Well that was Barnhouse and Figuhr. They had both agreed, having never met.

So, we started. I collected all the material and I noticed the division in Adventist theology. A lot of what Canright said was right. He had it absolutely accurate in the early days. A lot of other people—Herbert, Bird—had some good criticisms, which came out after my material. Then there were others down the line, E.B. Jones and others, who had made observations from their own experiences within Adventism—a lot of

which were valid. But times had changed in certain areas, and they had not caught up with this. So I met with E.B. Jones, and he told me the Adventists would deceive me and I shouldn't listen to them—that they were experts at manipulation. Then, anybody I talked to who was an ex-Adventist of the Jones type—you see, they were very sincere—was apparently badly burned by some experiences in Adventism. It wasn't all their fault, but they were really hostile.

So I ran into this hostility and I decided what I had to do was evaluate the primary sources. I couldn't become involved in what ex-Adventists thought about Adventism. I had to get into what the primary sources said, unless what the ex-Adventists said was backed by primary sources. That's a different thing. So I proceeded to collect the material.

We met in Washington and it was a confrontation. Froom thought he was an apologist—though he was a great church historian, he was not an apologist. And Froom was convinced that he wasn't going to give me one inch. Obviously, I was a young man and he was a great historian—and he was. I would controvert him in specific dialogue, he would shout at me, and we would really get going. I would shout back, too. We had a couple of sessions there that were really something. Poor Roy Anderson sat there and would say, "Now brethren, we must be calm here." He is a



W.E. READ

dear, dear soul. He was editor of *Ministry* then. And he'd calm Froom down.

W.E. Read, great old servant of God, said, "We've got to get back to the basic issue here, Froom. Never mind the differences. We can argue about 'soul sleep' forever. This has nothing to do with the basic issue. That's not going to separate our fellowship. We've got to get back to these basic things. These are real concerns." And, we would get back.

Unruh didn't quite know what to make of either Cannon or myself. I brought Cannon

along because he was working on his doctorate in Greek. He is brilliant, as history has now shown us; he is one of the best Greek scholars the Church has. And he was convinced, as I was in the beginning, that Adventism was a cult because we had materials which were just flagrantly disobedient to exegesis, to Scripture; and we knew it was wrong, and we could point it out very simply. I mean, a first-year Greek student could point it out. So we thought, "Hey, you know, we really ought to put our heads together on this." George was a Christian Missionary Alliance professor and I was a teacher. "OK, let's go at it; you take the Greek and I'll take the apologetics. We'll put them together and see what we can come up with." So, that is how we approached it.

Back to the meeting in Washington. George and I started pointing out that there were differences in Adventist publications. Well, the men who were there were largely unaware of how really bad the publications had become. Froom was vigorously denying some of the things I was quoting. I had brought a large suitcase, and I opened it on the conference table and spread out the papers before them. I'll never forget this! "Read it," I said; and they read it and were appalled!

Anderson said, "I've never believed that!"

Froom said, "I certainly never have."

Unruh said, "Never."

And Read said, "Certainly not!"

So I said, "Fine. Here are four Adventists, the best brains around, in this committee—the editor of the *Ministry Magazine*, the head of your Hebrew Research Department, your best historian, and one of the most prominent conference presidents—and you are sitting here with how many total years in Adventism? And you didn't know?"

**CURRENTS:** I don't know how Froom could not have been aware of all that?

**MARTIN:** Well, you have to understand Froom's mind. He was selective in his work. He was really a great historian. He spent most of his time in history archives digging out material. He would seldom ever get involved in basic theological issues. Read was aware of some of it because of some of the material that crossed his desk. Anderson was too busy running the ministers and ministerial associations throughout the world; he had work for ten men. He didn't have time to go through what I did. And then, men underneath him apparently were never assigned any projects of that nature.

I think perhaps what I was able to do was focus their attention for the first time on the fact: "Hey! You guys are talking out of both sides of your mouth and you don't even know it." That is when I think they woke up. They weren't just denying it to impress me; they honestly were in shock! Then they started reading the mark of the beast material, the incompleteness of atonement with all kinds of stuff in there, and some of the early things in Mrs. White. I said, "We just simply have to get to the place where we recognize that Ellen



LEROEY E. FROOM

White may very well have exercised the gift of prophecy, as in I Corinthians 12 and 14. She may very well have had words of wisdom and knowledge from the Lord. This has been going on down through the centuries; it's nothing new. But you have to be extremely careful when you talk about these things that you do not place them in the area of canonicity; and secondly, you have to be careful that you don't end up with a female pope who is going to tell you what the text says, when that's the work of the Holy Spirit."

"You are right," they said.

And I said, "Well, what we have to do is try to get to the real Ellen White and what she thought of herself. Then, even if she made mistakes in judgment about herself, let's assume it's on the side of the angels. That she wasn't a ravenous wolf or false prophet who set out to deceive the church and that she was not manipulating the people around her and that she did not have phony visions. Let's assume that she had a genuine manifestation of spiritual gifts. With that also goes fallibility. With that goes the fact that one can misinterpret, that one can make mistakes." Well, that was the first major breakthrough we got.

At that juncture, I ran into F.D. Nichol. Nichol was an absolute worshipper of Ellen White. If he were here now (F.D. was a friend of mine), I would say it to his face. And we got to that place in our dialogues (just a couple I had with Nichol, independent of these men). I met with Nichol over in Illinois when we were covering a conference and we spent a day together.

It was before 1960, of historical value. Nichol said that he was very glad he did not have to defend the writers of the Scripture but only Mrs. White. And I said, "Brother Nichol, have you lost your reason? I wasn't as tactful as I am today. 'Have you lost your reason?' Do you realize what you have just said? Do you realize you have elevated Mrs.

White over Scripture without even thinking about it? You said you are glad you only have to defend her and not the Scriptures, as if the Scriptures were more fallible than Ellen White.

He just paused and looked at me.

I told him, "You can't say that. You say something like that publicly and Adventism is a cult." They have exalted the leaders' interpretation capabilities and gifts over those of the Church, the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the Word. You can't do that." Well, the General Conference wisely separated Nichol and myself. He was prohibited from making contact with me.

**CURRENTS:** He had already written *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*.

**MARTIN:** *Answers to Objections* and *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, which I read.

**CURRENTS:** So he had to know its difficulties.

**MARTIN:** Well, I went through his arguments. I didn't just ignore F.D. Nichol. He had a good mind. He made a lot of points in favor of Mrs. White in areas that were, let's say, questionable. OK, I could see his position. But there were areas where there just wasn't any way any human mind, rationally operating, was going to be able to get out. "God showed me, 'Build the Health Institute'." James White comes home, tears it down! I don't care who you are and what kind of machinations you go through, Papa [James White] made the decision, not God. And I said to the guys at the table, "There is no way out of this."

"Well, let's not really get into it," they said.

"All right, let's not really get into it," I replied. "But you understand from an evangelistic perspective, there's no way out of this."

**CURRENTS:** Nichol would have been better off if he had said it was a sexist generation and let it go at that.

**MARTIN:** He would have been better off to have just ignored the thing or said, "There are areas in which, perhaps, we cannot understand why Mrs. White did this . . ." or whatever, but to defend it!

**CURRENTS:** You may not be aware how much Arthur White helped him with that book.

**MARTIN:** All right. Now, we had a problem there. I met Arthur White, who was very gracious but extremely determined not to give me any information other than what he absolutely had to give. I said to the committee, "I do not want to do business with Arthur White or the White Estate. Are you going to represent the Adventist denomination to me or is Mr. White going to?"

They replied, "The General Conference represents the denomination."

"Good," I said. "You are the representatives, a committee appointed by the president of the General Conference."

"Yes."

"Then," I replied, "we are going to do the Lord's business together, not Mr. White.

You just get me the information I want from Mr. White because I am not going back again." And they gave me whatever I asked for. I asked for a lot of material—they were fair; they gave it to me. As we progressed they came to trust me.

Cannon and I came to have great respect for their integrity and great trust in them.

To this day I don't think I have met four finer men of Christian integrity than R.A. Anderson, T.E. Unruh, L.E. Froom and W.E. Read or, for that matter, Ted Heppenstall—men of God who really worked earnestly trying to find answers. They realized that separation between members of the body of Christ on peripheral theology is sin and this sin had to be cleared away. The debris had to be cleaned up. And, if there was a real basis then, there should be fellowship.

So, I went back to Barnhouse and presented the evidence I had. He said, "Are you absolutely certain?"

"Yes," I said, "I am absolutely certain. Now the question is the denomination itself. It is a mixed bag of people. If the General Conference takes a strong stand with the book, *Questions on Doctrine*, and really puts it in all their publishing houses, and if the General Conference puts my book, which I am now going to write, into the publishing houses so that they get both aspects of our discussion, then we have a fighting chance to influence the denomination towards evangelical fellowship; we can have rapport and there is a chance that we can start binding up some of the wounds in the body of Christ."

**CURRENTS:** Now *Questions on Doctrine* was the written answers to the questions you and Barnhouse submitted

**MARTIN:** I submitted them and I worked with Froom on some of them too because Froom wanted them placed in such a way that Adventists would understand exactly what we were saying.



R. ALLAN ANDERSON



**CURRENTS:** And the manuscript of that book went to 250 Adventist leaders around the world and had apparently unanimous support before publication.

**MARTIN:** Almost complete.

I wrote my book in 1960, three years after *Questions and Answers*. I had already done the articles for *Eternity Magazine*. They read the articles. We went over them together. Not that they were going to censure what I had said (they wouldn't even suggest that). They wanted to be certain what I said was such that Adventists who read *Eternity*, and read the reprints of the articles, would understand where we were coming from because we had two different vocabularies. And—this was a terribly important point historically—we were actually at that juncture synchronizing vocabulary structure between Adventism and evangelical Christianity, which had never been done before. That was a major semantic breakthrough. You have no idea how much time went into making sure we used terms that were mutually understandable.

**CURRENTS:** Give one or two examples just for fun, of terms that both sides could use but use differently.

**MARTIN:** Well, in early Adventist theology "Remnant Church" meant that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination—the General Conference when in session—was the highest governing body on earth, that they were a special people called out by God with the Third Angel's Message, and that the seal of this was the fact that they kept the seventh day Sabbath. And that set them apart as the "Remnant Church."

Alright, now. That view gradually had been altered and expanded through the years in the thinking of moderate Adventists so that they did not come out and say it in publications; it was sort of a tacit agreement. They weren't back in the 1870s and '80s anymore with, "We are the only church." They were recognizing other members of the body of Christ, even though they worshipped on Sunday rather than on Saturday. For the first time we got out in the open this new tolerance. I asked, "What do you mean by 'Remnant Church'?" To our people it means that you are the only Christians. To some of your people that is what it means, too. And to other members of your church it means, well, we are special people—God marked us out but we are not the only Christians. Now, how do we get these strings tied together?" So, we tried to deal with it in *Questions on Doctrine*, where we spelled out that there were other members of the body of Christ. The Adventists considered themselves unique because of what they believed were revelations from Mrs. White to the church. I didn't buy the basic argument, but we printed the argument, perhaps for the first time, where Adventists and non-Adventists could at least see where each of them was coming from.

**CURRENTS:** You were willing to learn that we were unique although you weren't sure

we were right?

**MARTIN:** Sure. I thought some of Mrs. White's material was prophetic. I felt some of her insights were extremely helpful and I regarded her as a sister in the Lord. I wasn't out to attack Ellen White's character. It took me a long time to get F.D. Nichol and others to believe that. I was out as a Christian brother and scholar to evaluate Mrs. White, as I thought she ought to be evaluated. And I thought she really believed what could have very well be religious reveries (we see it in charismatic circles today all the time)—"The Lord has shown me this." And it doesn't happen; now what are you going to do? Say that this person is a false prophet, an enemy of the gospel; somebody who is going to be pilloried and never listened to again, the way biblical false prophets were supposed to be treated? Or are you dealing with a Christian with spiritual gifts who misuses a gift or mistakes a gift? That's completely different from calling a person a false prophet. And some of Mrs. White's statements in the early days, as I pointed out to the General Conference representatives, were theologically off the wall. They just wouldn't stand up. These men were very tactful. They were true to their convictions, but they were not intransigent. They were willing to look at biblical evidence, exegesis, and facts. The resulting book, *Questions on Doctrine*, was a landmark because it said what so many Adventists had believed for so long but had never had in print as a reference.

**CURRENTS:** So two books came out of these discussions: one from the Adventists and one that you wrote in 1960?

**MARTIN:** Right. At this juncture something unique happened. Roy Anderson can confirm this for you; he knows the inner working of it. Somehow, when my book came out, they got an advance copy.

**CURRENTS:** Was there a prior agreement as to what would happen to your book when it came out?

**MARTIN:** Oh, yes. We would distribute their book and promote it through Christian bookstores, through *Eternity Magazine*, and anyplace else we could.

**CURRENTS:** Even though you had been doing that for a few years?

**MARTIN:** I have faithfully done that. And they were to take my book and get it into all the Adventist bookstores and publishing houses so that the Adventists could see the work I had done. They reneged on that. The General Conference reneged on that, and Anderson was very upset.

**CURRENTS:** Do you know who to define as General Conference in that case?

**MARTIN:** I don't, and I wouldn't make an accusation. But they did not keep their word. As a result, only *Questions on Doctrine* came out in Seventh-day Adventist bookstores. *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* did not. In addition to that, they wrote a book to answer my book without giving my book a hearing. That was wrong. The book is called *Seventh-day Adventists*

*Answer Questions on Doctrine*, I don't object to their answering my arguments in *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*; that's only fair. But at least let the people read [for themselves] what I said!

What they did was censure the Adventist people.

That's what they did.

**CURRENTS:** What explanation was given you for not meeting the agreement?

**MARTIN:** Hung heads and deep apologies from the four men I worked with, who felt that they, themselves, had not been treated fairly in that respect. I cannot say enough for the integrity of these men. They never backed down on their positions.

About my book, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*—when I got ready to print, I went to Zondervan who said, "This is explosive stuff. Do you realize what you are saying?"

I said, "Yes. It's true; we should print it. I am an expert on cults; you printed my other books, right? I am the director of the division of cult apologetics for the largest Christian publishing company. Are you going to believe me or not?"



DONALD G. BARNHOUSE

The Zondervan brothers said, "We believe you."

"Fine," I said, "print it."

Well, about two months after that I received a call. "Walter, will you fly to Grand Rapids? We are having some problems."

I previously had problems with Louis Talbert, at the Theological Seminary. I met with Talbert and presented the evidence I had uncovered. He was very impressed by it and said he would wait and see what the outcome of the final research was before he said anything. Well, when we published the *Eternity Magazine* articles he blew his cork and attacked Barnhouse.

**CURRENTS:** You lost about 11,000 subscribers, right?

**MARTIN:** Yes, that's correct. But God gave us all those subscribers back again and more.

**CURRENTS:** What fraction was the 11,000

of the total?

**MARTIN:** We only had 33,000.

**CURRENTS:** Almost a third of your subscribers were lost?

**MARTIN:** I believe that was the figure. But to Barnhouse's credit, when we were faced with this, he said: "It doesn't make any difference how many we lose. If it's the truth, God will see us through." That's courage—more courage than the General Conference ever had. They didn't even have the backbone to face their own constituency.

Back to the problems at Zondervan. M.R. DeHaan, a popular Zondervan author, was

biblically.

Unfortunately, what you just said introduces the problem of ethical and moral integrity in her publications. Now, all of us, I have done it myself, quote sections of books. Usually I'll try to footnote them unless I paraphrase something and I am not even aware that I've paraphrased it; in which case, if it was brought to my attention, I'd change it. I can understand how it is possible. But not pages and pages and pages!

So, I feel that there is a compromise, revenue-wise. I think the General Conference leaders are compromising with the

of the things we are talking about now, plus more. A large amount of what I have to say is going to be conditioned by the response I get from the General Conference, and the answer to the important question, "Why did you let the most singularly influential book of the last 30 years in your denomination go out of print? Who was responsible for it going out of print? Why? Does the Adventist denomination, in fact, really hold to what it originally said, or is the Adventist denomination playing games with us? Have they changed their position or were they always playing games with us?" I believe these are fair questions.

**CURRENTS:** Can you expect a truthful answer after what happened 30 years ago?

**MARTIN:** I have ways of making sure that the answer is truthful. . . . You see, 30 years ago I didn't have near the audience I have now. My tapes on the cults have reached a circulation of 15 million. Those are not my figures but the figures of the people who distribute them.

Secondly, *The Kingdom of the Cults* is in print as a standard textbook and is used all over the world. It is now in its 37th printing, coming up for revision and expansion; and in there is the chapter on Adventism, which I put in deliberately. The book will be a classic for years. The chapter has got to be in there spelling out that Adventists are not a cult, because they are already classified that way. What better place to deal with it than in a classic book? Anthony Hoekema came after me with hammer and tongs: he is a friend of mine. And M.R. De Haan came after me, among other people, because of the position I took. I haven't recanted my position, but if the Seventh-day Adventist denomination will not back up its answers with actions and put *Questions on Doctrine* back in print—and, in effect, take a strong stand against people in your denomination who are a very vocal and powerful group and who very well can bring the judgment of God on up—then they're in real trouble that I can't help them out of; and nobody else can either.

E. Schuyler English, I should tell you, was the first to print, along with *Eternity*, the material on Seventh-day Adventism. He agreed with me that it was something we should do, regardless of whatever flack we got. Others picked up the same thing. We pretty much split the evangelical world. But through the years, I can say this without hesitation, the position Barnhouse took and I took—and *Questions on Doctrine* took—prevailed in the evangelical world, so that a whole new climate exists. The General Conference is now jeopardizing that whole new climate. They will throw themselves back a half century if they do not clarify these issues.

**CURRENTS:** You wrote a review of *The White Lie*, Walter Rea's book about Ellen White. In it you stated, "... another defense put forth by the SDA hierarchy is that Ellen's writings were compiled in the same

## *The Father was not gleaning the ancient writings of religion in order to instruct His Son. This is absolute nonsense.*

objecting to my book. I flew to Grand Rapids and met with him. De Haan chewed me out for 45 minutes as only De Haan could. He said I was betraying the church. I had been taken in by the Adventists and he didn't want me to get hurt. He didn't want to see my reputation hurt. Finally he said to Pat and Bernie Zondervan, "If you print this book, I'll take all my books out of here and I'll never give you another book."

He was their biggest seller. This was 1957. Pat and Bernie Zondervan said, "Well, M.R., we don't want to lose you; we love you and that means a great deal to us. But if Walter is telling the truth, this is a landmark issue. We want to get out there and tell the truth about it. It is really a breakthrough and we're going to print it." And they did. I think the book sold between 25,000 and 50,000 copies which, in those days, was a very good sale.

But if the General Conference had kept its promise, which it didn't, the book would have gone to all Adventist groups. Then a lot of the seeding that has taken place through the years would have been an instantaneous type of event, and Adventist laity would have seen that there were other legitimate doctrinal perspectives. But they didn't get that chance. The "old guard," apparently—whoever they are—have enough power, probably dominated largely by the interest of the White Estate. And I feel that the White Estate and the denomination itself have got themselves into a spiritually compromising position they're going to have to face. It's revenue versus repentance. And Mrs. White cannot be defended against the charges of plagiarism. She cannot be defended against certain specific theological errors. She can be retained, however, as a pastoral voice in manifesting spiritual gifts of value to the denomination in the past, of value now, and of value in the future.

**CURRENTS:** A moral influence?

**MARTIN:** We are talking moral in the sense that she very carefully hewed the line,

White Estate. I think they are trying to preserve the entire fabric and structure of the denomination historically. It can't be done. There are too many holes in everybody's denominational history and structure to try to preserve it in its entirety. Everybody has made mistakes. And they have got to come to a genuine repentance because they are trying to cover up facts. They are trying to cover up truth. If they will stand with *Questions on Doctrine*, and if they will answer my questions—and I have only asked three questions—directly and truthfully, then I am going to defend them as my brothers in Christ and try to work with them and pray with them towards a position that really will reflect the truth.

**CURRENTS:** What are the three questions? Will you articulate them?

**MARTIN:** I prefer not to articulate them now because I think the General Conference has a right to see them first and respond to them before I talk about them publicly. But the questions are very pointed and direct. There is no possibility of mistaking what I am saying. I am not trying to be an inquisitor. I did not come to the Adventists as an inquisitor 30 years ago. I am a brother. But if men will suppress truth and hold down the truth in unrighteousness, then the Scripture says, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against this." In other words, you cannot survive this. You will not receive the blessing of God.

**CURRENTS:** One of your research consultants recently wrote a letter [in the summer of 1982] to an Adventist, and I quote: "We do expect Professor Martin will be making some form of public statement concerning his findings and recent dialogue with the SDA leadership in the very near future." Have you made that statement somewhere or would you care to say something about it now for the readers of the *Adventist Currents*?

**MARTIN:** I am going to be printing, as I told Brother Wilson, a booklet discussing some

manner as that of the biblical writers. Rea presents a concise, thorough refutation of this premise." There is a whole lot behind that. I am not confident Rea did a good job of parsing the difference between the problems of source usage in Ellen White and the problems of source usage in Scripture.

**MARTIN:** I didn't write this review.

**CURRENTS:** Oh! I'm sorry.

**MARTIN:** This was done by Lynne Scheffer, a researcher I put on the project for five months, to sift all the materials. I have cartons of materials. The article was published in *Forward*. Walter Rea I know personally. I knew him in Washington. He was down there when I first went down to the Conference to meet with the brethren. He was working with the Conference at the time and I met him later on in northern California. He did a thorough, Herculean job of compiling data. The thing I told him at the time, lovingly, was that I thought if I were writing it, I would not become emotionally involved to the place where people might get turned off by my emotion and by my frustration and anger at what had gone on and what I had discovered, rather than listening to what I was saying. I think that Rea's position in terms of documentation is irrefutable, largely. I think the material I have compiled and others, independently of Rea, is very strong material and will stand up. But I think the denomination has to come to grips with the fact that if they don't face it, it will not go away; it will not be swept under the rug or die. It is going to keep generating more and more problems and foment difficulties.

**CURRENTS:** Walter feels that you sometimes need a two by four to get a donkey's attention, and he hasn't been able to be persuaded away from that.

**MARTIN:** I know. We talked about this in great detail. He drove over to see me and showed me the original manuscript of *The White Lie* before they ever published it. I got in touch immediately with Roy Allen Anderson and with a committee [Kenneth Vine, Robert Olson, Robert Spangler, Bert Beach, and R.A. Anderson] that met at Loma Linda in January of 1982. I asked the questions I am asking the General Conference and I specifically made clear-cut statements to them about the dangers involved. There was a consensus of opinion among the brethren that something very definite had to be done of a positive nature to offset a lot of the statements that were coming out. And I left it there until my recent letter, since I am getting ready to publish. I sent my letter to Wilson. This is not my review, but I am substantially in agreement with him. I would go one step further. As I told F.D. Nichol, "You are trying to defend Mrs. White at the expense of Scripture. You can't do that."

**CURRENTS:** If you are going to use source criticism on one thing, it's legitimate to use source criticism on the other.

**MARTIN:** Sure, if you are going to assume that you can use a source criticism, fine. Writers of the Bible drew upon pagan

sources. Paul quoted from uninspired authors in Acts 17. Revelation has quotations from secular sources. Nobody is denying that, but that's not plagiarism.

**CURRENTS:** The phenomenon is different in that culture or in that context, perhaps, than it was in the 19th century. Plus the readers knew that the writer knew that the readers knew.

**MARTIN:** But, there is a circular reasoning involved in defending Mrs. White. You have probably already detected it—"The writers of the Bible did the same thing as Mrs. White. Mrs. White is permitted to do it also." That holds if one assumes, circularly, that Mrs. White is to be considered as one of the writers of the Bible. And then you are right back to square one.

Let me read you something that's really of a cultic mentality and dangerous, that you may not be aware of. I'm quoting an Adventist official:

*This is a statement I like very much. Speaking of Christ, the originator of all truth. This is found in Manuscript 25 that Ellen White wrote:*

*"In His discourse Christ did not bring many things before them at once lest He might confuse their minds. He made every point clear and distinct. He did not disdain a repetition of old and familiar truths and prophecies if they would serve His purpose to inculcate ideas. Christ was the originator of all the ancient gems of truth." Now I believe there are ancient gems of truth in Hindu writings, in Buddha's writings, and ancient gems of truth in Mohammed's writings, in the Islam world. I don't doubt this at all. Through the work of the enemy, these truths have been displaced; they have been disconnected from the true position, placed in the framework of error. Christ's work was to readjust and establish the precious gems in the framework of truth. The principles of truth which have been given by Himself to bless the world, had through Satan's agency been buried and had apparently become extinct."*

## *The White Estate and the denomination itself have got themselves into a spiritually compromising position . . . It's revenue versus repentance.*

Now you're really in trouble. You've got Christ drawing upon pagan religious sources as a means of restating truth—this is directly contradicted by Scripture. Actually, Jesus said "The words that I speak unto you my Father gave me, what I should say, what I should speak." The Father was not gleaning the ancient writings of religion in order to instruct His Son.

*"Christ rescued them from the rubbish of error, gave them a new vital force and*

*commanded them to shine as precious jewels and stand fast forever."*

*I am convinced that if someone took the time, you could find every single parable in some ancient writing that Jesus used.*

This is absolute nonsense. I am a professor of comparative religions; I find this absolute, utter nonsense.

**CURRENTS:** Who is the Adventist official who said that?

**MARTIN:** Let's keep going. I'll tell you. [Martin forgets to say he is quoting from *Ministry Magazine* editor and General Conference Ministerial Association secretary Robert Spangler]

*He [Christ] gave it to begin with, He took it, changed it around and adapted it to what He wanted to teach the people. He was the originator of it to begin with, maybe a thousand years before. Who knows? First it shook me, like I told you before, but it no longer bothers me to understand that Ellen White borrowed passages, words, sentences, paragraphs from other writings, but she put it into a different framework than the original author who used it. Never forget that. And therefore, I am convinced that God is speaking to us through the Spirit of Prophecy. He speaks to us through the Word of God, and no matter where they may have gotten the words from or of some other language, the beautiful words, whatever, that does not bother me as long as I know it is the truth . . .*

Walter Martin who is a good friend of R.A. Anderson met us in Loma Linda in the month of January and we spent about two and a half hours together discussing the relationship of Ellen White to the Scriptures in our church. He had gotten hold of some materials; he felt that we ought to come out with some kind of a statement. That's in brief what this whole meeting was all about. So I went back to the General Conference along with Brother Robert Olson, and also Bert Beach, who was on this committee along with Kenneth Vine who is the head of the theology department from

*Loma Linda, four of us, and R.A. Anderson. We met with Martin for two and a half hours and he was concerned over all this talk about Ellen White being put above the Scriptures and so forth. So, as a result of that, I brought with me a tentative statement; the trouble is it's going to take some time to go through all this but let me give it to you quickly.*

And he gives a statement which I think avoids it. But the gentleman [Spangler] said

he had seen so much good, in Seventh-day Adventism, come out of the movement. He didn't think there was anything that could be shown to him that would shake his faith in the inspiration of Mrs. White! Now, this is the perfect cultic mentality—circular, self-authenticating, experiential, no basis in objective fact. If that's going to be the party line, my brothers, kiss it goodbye with the evangelical world. They will descend on this.

**CURRENTS:** Dr. Martin, doesn't their behavior—in regard to your book and their own book, *Questions on Doctrine*, basically suppress it and make sure they distance themselves from it—prove it was not really representative of the church as they led you to believe?

**MARTIN:** I think, as I said before, that the men who spoke to me [in the 1950s] represented a conservative Adventism which wanted fellowship with the body of Christ. The acceptance of *Questions on Doctrine*, when it was published, by so many of the leadership of the church and by people all around the world who were Adventist, hailing it as a major landmark—a bridge to fellowship and so forth—indicates that a great body of Adventists, this amorphous body, are eager for fellowship with other members of the body of Christ and welcome something like this as a means of communication. I think there is now a group of powerful individuals in positions of authority in the denomination who, because the denomination is very authoritarian, are able to control large segments of the populace, simply by being their voice. And I don't think the average Seventh-day Adventist would deny *Questions on Doctrine*, if they went through it point by point. And I don't think they would be hostile to it. But I think people would who are conditioned by the mentality we are now seeing come out in leadership. Yes, definitely. But to say the whole denomination was misrepresented by Anderson and Froom and everyone else—I don't think the evidence would support that. Reuben Figuhr was about as conservative a president as the Adventists ever had. He has been questioned in this area, and is adamant that *Questions on Doctrine* had the major support of leadership in the denomination. After all, they sent the book out all over the world to their top people, prior to publication, and they only received minor flack.

**CURRENTS:** But perhaps the near unanimity with which it was hailed was the result of that authoritarian administration saying, "We want to publish this. . . . It is going to be good for us."

**MARTIN:** What you are saying is maybe the people didn't buy it.

**CURRENTS:** But they felt obligated to because of the authoritarian structure that came from the highest levels. Have you considered that possibility?

**MARTIN:** It's always a possibility. Who knows the minds of men and how they reason and what their methodology is? But I am not going to extrapolate from the General

Conference backing out on my book and make it a personal issue.

I am not saying we are categorizing Ellen White in the biblical context of a false prophet. I'm saying that's an ideal way to protect yourself. Joseph Smith said the same thing: "The time will come when they will challenge what I said; that only proves that I am telling the truth." That's logical madness.

**CURRENTS:** But really, do you think Adventists care if they are classified as a cult? Wouldn't they look at this as a good sign?

**MARTIN:** If the mentality has degenerated to the place where they are willing to say, "For our convictions we will be called a cult," without ever really considering the possibility that their convictions are erroneous, then what you are saying could happen.

**CURRENTS:** Cast out for Christ.

**MARTIN:** The mentality would dictate that kind of behavior pattern. Now, I don't know the mind of the General Conference. I don't know the mind of Neal Wilson. I haven't talked with him. I have received correspondence. Some of the material I have—there are boxes full of it here—I'm not supposed to have. It doesn't inspire much confidence in me regarding how they deal with their people. And when a minister asks for a hearing, and a committee comes together, the guy blows them away; then the committee walks away from that and blows him away. I have to believe things are not the way they ought to be biblically. What I think is happening in the echelons of leadership right now is that they have gotten to the place where they have elevated Ellen White to be the infallible interpreter of Scripture. By so doing they have painted themselves into a theological corner. They are on Masada and they don't know it. If Ellen White is an infallible interpreter of Scripture, then what they've preached against all these years has finally come to pass—the self-fulfilled prophecy; they have a pope. And if what she says infallibly interprets the Scriptures, might I ask the next logical question? How is it that we test her infallibility?

I never met D.M. Canright, but he was a personal friend of Mrs. White's. A lot of his personal reminiscences are very revealing about her personality. She was an ill-educated person; she was a person given to religious reveries, some of which her own husband didn't buy. She was a person who believed absolutely that she had received some messages from God; and in some instances I think maybe she did. That doesn't guarantee you are going to be an infallible prophet, and that whatever you say about Scripture and interpreting Scripture is going to guarantee it for other people.

**CURRENTS:** Have you read the material on the injury to her head and the hypothesis that she was just suffering from partial complex seizures?

**MARTIN:** I read the medical material on the possible diagnosis of her in this area. Although I have not read anyone's rebuttal of that. But I'll say something; it's very difficult

to diagnose certain mental or emotional disturbances with the patient in the room and the machines hooked up and all the sophistication of modern medicine. I am, therefore, a little bit suspicious of the smell of roses, the color purple, and these things being connected with specific mental disorders and to fix them to her, or any person, historically. It

## Questions on

Loud and bitter reaction to *Questions on Doctrine* came from those who felt that in it "the truth" had been sold for a mess of pottage—favor with the evangelicals. Milian Lauritz Andreassen (1876-1962), long retired seminary professor, published his anguished "Letters to the Churches" and lost his credentials. According to R.A. Anderson, Andreassen phoned Donald Barnhouse long-distance for 58 minutes to tell him the General Conference had apostatized and that he, Andreassen, would have Figuhr impeached.

Although we cannot reproduce any of that conversation, the transcript of another long-distance call suffered by Barnhouse indicates that other Adventists shared Andreassen's sense of betrayal. The call from Al Hudson of Baker, Oregon, reached Barnhouse at his *Eternity Magazine* office in Philadelphia on the morning of May 16, 1958. Here are excerpts from their conversation, involving the nature of Christ and Ellen White's stature, that did not put Hudson at ease about *Questions on Doctrine*:

**Hudson:** They [G.C. brethren involved in discussion with Barnhouse and Martin] are taking the position, are they not, that Christ has the nature of Adam before he sinned? Isn't that true?

**Barnhouse:** I hope not!

**Hudson:** What is their position as you understand it?

**Barnhouse:** That Christ had, that He was the God-man. Adam was a created being subject to fall. Jesus Christ was the God-man, not subject to fall.

**Hudson:** And that's your understanding of the position of our leaders?

**Barnhouse:** Of course. They have taken it so strongly, and it is in their book [*Questions on Doctrine*]. We hold, they say, with the church of all the centuries that Jesus Christ was the eternal sinless Son of God, etc., etc.

. . . If you do not believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal, sinless Son of God, that He could not have sinned—and goodness, we have eighteen quotations from Mrs. White saying the same thing—eighteen quotations from Ellen G. White stating exactly this position, and denying what you are telling me . . .

**Hudson:** On the other hand I have quotations that state just the opposite.



might make a good case to chase down in a great detective story, but if you are talking about hard evidence, forget it.

I believe Ellen White had an extremely complex personality, and I think she plagiarized materials because she believed the Lord had shown her what the sources said was the truth. She simply appropriated

material and gave it out. I think she wanted the credit for it and that's why she didn't footnote. She was mortal; she was a sinner like anyone else.

**CURRENTS:** So she was a commandment breaker—which to her was one of the worst sins. If you were a commandment breaker, how terrible. Where does that leave us?

## Doctrine: a Theological “Sting?”

**Barnhouse:** One quotation.

**Hudson:** We have more than that.

**Barnhouse:** No.

**Hudson:** You don't have them all.

**Barnhouse:** Oh yes we do. Look, Froom and the rest of them say that Walter Martin knows more about Seventh-day Adventists than any [seminary] professor in Takoma Park, Washington . . . He's read it all . . .

**Hudson:** You know she wrote about 25 million words. That's quite a lot for a man to read.

**Barnhouse:** That's too much, you know. She was running off at the mouth, and the Holy Spirit certainly was not doing it.

**Hudson:** Do you think that Anderson and Froom agree with you on that position?

**Barnhouse:** Look, I *know* that these men are intelligent enough to know that she was a fallible human being, and that she said so herself . . . Do you believe that she was in error ever?

**Hudson:** As a human being?

**Barnhouse:** In her writing. Do you believe that in some of her writing that you have to point to certain sentences and say, “Boy, she sure pulled a booper [sic]! That's for the birds! It is not true!”

**Hudson:** I haven't encountered any of those quotations, no.

**Barnhouse:** You haven't?

**Hudson:** No.

**Barnhouse:** Oh, brother, are you a dupe. You are not as honest as the people at Takoma Park, or Richards. Richards doesn't hold with you.

**Hudson:** You mean of the Voice of Prophecy?

**Barnhouse:** Yes.

**Hudson:** He feels, then, that she has written error?

**Barnhouse:** Of course he does. *Everyone* of these men have said this to me. Every man. *Every man*. They believe that she was raised up of God to be a great blessing, and that the Spirit of Prophecy was upon her, but they all agree that she wrote error in some places.

**Hudson:** You gather from your association with those men that they believe that she was a prophet though.

**Barnhouse:** They believe that God came upon her in a special way and for a message to His people at a special time.

**Hudson:** Would you gather the impression in your talking with them that they feel that

she was a prophet in the same sense that Isaiah and Jeremiah were?

**Barnhouse:** Of course not. Certainly not. They're intelligent men, and they are Christians . . . She was just a good woman who was greatly blessed and greatly mistaken, very frequently.

**Hudson:** And you don't think Elder[s] Froom and Richards and the others take my position that she was a true prophet?

**Barnhouse:** *Of course they don't.*

**Hudson:** I see.

**Barnhouse:** *None of them do.*

**Hudson:** Well, I appreciate your time.

Two decades later these same issues continue to imperil the unity of our fellowship. Dissent over *Christ's All-atoning Sacrifice*, the Sabbath School lesson quarterly for the first quarter of 1983, indicates that Adventists remain especially divided over the nature of Christ. (See news item this issue.)

The eruption of SDA doctrinal volcanoes fueled by Walter Rea and Desmond Ford and the inadequate responses of official Adventist publications to those challenges have not been lost on Walter Martin. Martin closed a presentation assessing the Adventist situation to a gathering of evangelicals in Napa, California, on February 22, 1983, sympathetically but emphatically:

“This is the conclusion of the whole matter. We dare not accept any authority—any authority—that in its role becomes the supreme interpreter and arbiter of Scripture. We dare not. If Adventism embraces this, they are no longer Protestant. They have accepted historic Catholic theology, and Mrs. White becomes the infallible female pope . . .

“What Christ calls us to is healing—not healing by ignoring the truth, but healing by acknowledging the truth . . . healing in the lives of regenerate Adventists. If this is done then I believe God will give them blessings they have never had in their entire history . . .

“Our role as non-Adventists is to be empathetic, prayerful, and insistent that Scripture and Scripture alone be the basis of our fellowship as well as our salvation . . . God give us the grace as Christians to care enough to labor for it and the Adventists who see it to know that because of Jesus Christ, we care.”

**MARTIN:** When I was once seated with a group of Seventh-day Adventist theologians and we got on the subject of commandment breaking, I said, “I am going to sound heretical to you, but we do know each other pretty well and therefore I am speaking as your brother.” And they all laughed. I continued, “None of us in this room is a commandment keeper. Because the Scripture says, ‘If we say we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Sin is the transgression of the law, and all unrighteousness is sin.’ Please tell me if anyone in this room considers himself, for a 24-hour period, totally righteous?”

No one said, “Boo.” “We are all commandment breakers,” I said.

Now, we don't begin our day saying, “Today I am going to make the effort to keep the Ten Commandments.” We begin our day saying, “Lord Jesus, give me the grace that I may walk with you.” Because if I am going to walk with Christ, I'll be obeying the will of God and the law of God. Now, I'm not going to make it all day. Maybe I might one day, but I miss the hours of 2, 4, 6 and 8 on Thursday, and 2, 5, 7 and 9 on Wednesday, whatever it may be. That's what the Pharisees were into—the idea of how they were going to keep the law perfectly. They missed the whole point of the law.

**CURRENTS:** But that's her point. She would make that point in a very stern way and then turn around and break the same commandment.

**MARTIN:** I know. D.M. Canright said she was whipped up in a lather about the slaughter house techniques and how the meat was bad to eat, etc. Of course this is a well-known fact of the time and she picked it up from Kellogg and others, not through divine revelation. It was a fact in the newspapers, but Mrs. White turns around and has a pork sandwich in Canright's presence. Canright almost choked. I believe Canright. I believe she ate a pork sandwich in his presence when she got through telling people they shouldn't eat pork, because she was a sinner.

**CURRENTS:** I can't corroborate the pork story but I can provide you with a letter in which she writes to her daughter-in-law, in the eighties, and orders some fresh snails.

**MARTIN:** And it's forbidden under Mosaic law. But anyway, we don't want to get into straining at the gnat and swallowing the camel. I am not an enemy of Adventism. I am a friend of Adventist people and a lover of truth. I did my level best at great risk—in 1956 and from then on—to take a strong position on the basis of *Questions on Doctrine*. If they are going to repudiate the book and turn back the pages, I have no other alternative but to rewrite the chapter in *The Kingdom of the Cults*. And I'll have no other alternative but to come out and do another tape or series of tapes. I mean, just lay the whole thing out. I don't want to do that. I'd much rather see them come around to a solid position.

**CURRENTS:** Haven't they repudiated it al-

ready in the *Review* during the last couple of years? Haven't they condemned *Questions on Doctrine* as a terrible heresy?

**MARTIN:** Well, now . . . this is an important point. Is that the General Conference's position or is that an editor of the *Review*? Are we talking about a person? People high in Adventism have told me that Wood was an unfortunate choice for the position and they are very happy he is not there. It is possible that Wood got away in the authoritarian structure with saying lots of things because no one could get to him or get at him. Well, the next editor of the *Review* might come along and do a complete about-face. I'm waiting to see what they're going to do. You see, one magazine knocking a book doesn't bother me. One prominent Adventist knocking it, or a group of them, doesn't bother me. What bothers me is the possibility that the governing body of the denomination has really taken it out of print because they don't want to believe it. Well, if they no longer want to believe, I want them to answer more questions.

**CURRENTS:** Is there any documentation from any General Conference leadership in the 1960s when they officially stopped publication of *Questions on Doctrine*?

**MARTIN:** I was told by a high authority it was scheduled for republication. They wanted to make a few minor changes, nothing really to do with answers; and I was to see it before they did it. He was enthusiastic about it going ahead.

**CURRENTS:** The 1960s?

**MARTIN:** When it was going out of print. I don't know what the date was, but he knows. He said he okayed it and it was going to be done. Then the powers that be, dominating the publication committee, whoever they were at that time, decided just to simply let it go out of print because there was pressure being placed on them from other sources. I suspect the White Estate and other people, zealous of preserving the image of an Ellen White they had created, did not like *Questions on Doctrine*, because it was honest.

I don't know the inner workings of it. And I am not too impressed with the integrity of how they deal in-house with a lot of their problems. I have enough correspondence here from people—a lot of the palaver that goes out: "Now, Brothers, we've got to

Christ and trying, as a brother, to say, "Look, there are a lot of evangelicals out there with good will towards you. Do you want to throw everything overboard for a position that simply will not stand up?" I said that at the meeting in Loma Linda—which is detailed in the letter to Wilson. And I have yet to receive a response.

I have yet to receive a response to questions that went back to the General Conference—two representatives [Robert Olson and Robert Spangler] took them back. I have yet to receive a response.

**CURRENTS:** You have talked about what you perceive to be several of Ellen White's documentable shortcomings or sins, if you want to call them that, and plagiarism or what not. However, you have not brought up the perjury issue. I am not sure how much you are aware of the recent information coming out concerning her involvement with the Shut Door idea, which was subsequently obscured by her statements essentially denying any involvement with the spreading of that heresy, if you will.

**MARTIN:** I think she believed it.

**CURRENTS:** The White Estate has admitted she misunderstood her early visions which seemed to teach it.

**MARTIN:** We knew that a long time ago but they wouldn't admit it.

**CURRENTS:** But it involves her, essentially, perjuring herself in order to save her credibility.

I read your account of Jehovah's Witnesses in the *Kingdom of the Cults* and the part where you are detailing the perjury committed by Russell, which totally destroys his credibility and his worthiness as a Christian leader. How would you apply that same reasoning or argument to Ellen White?

**MARTIN:** I think she made a mistake. I think she committed a sin. I think she panicked and tried to cover it up. I think those around her aided and abetted her in this. Also, I think the White Estate had it in conspiracy for years. About that, I don't think there is any doubt at all.

The difference between her and the Jehovah's Witnesses is not the crime itself. That was wrong. Whether Russell did it or whether Mrs. White did it is irrelevant. It's the nature of the person we are talking about. Was Charles Russell a Christian? Did

be brought out and spelled out clearly so it will show that Christians do these things. You have to be very careful about what they say, and even more careful in the light of something like that. That doesn't mean everything Mrs. White ever said, or wrote, or did, automatically loses its credibility.

If you go back into Church history and look at some of the people who wrote—and some of the things that were done—you get the distinct feeling they were sinners saved by grace. And yet, you do not throw out some of the great minds of the Church—and people in Church history—and say they have no credibility because they committed a sin or made a mistake.

**CURRENTS:** Should a distinction be made between what are just sins and those acts committed under the guise of inspiration and absolute authority? Such as saying, "The angel has shown me . . ." or saying, "In the name of God, I swear, I never had those kind of visions," and publish that under the name of God? Is there a difference between that and, say, committing adultery in private?

**MARTIN:** Sin is transgression of the law. There are sins that are greater in magnitude and there are greater punishments for them. Christ taught that there were degrees of sin and there were degrees of punishment. It is an even greater sin when someone in a position of authority, who is looked to and respected, deliberately does something with full knowledge, and covers it up or perjures himself. Yes. Or plagiarizes or something like that. Yes. That is a great sin, and we cannot ignore that sin. But I've got to make a distinction here that may not make some people happy. I have been pressed and pressed by people to get me to say Ellen White is a false prophet.

The logic used is, "But she said God told her something and it didn't come to pass or it wasn't true, and, she claimed to be speaking prophetically; that makes her a false prophet."

Let me make an important distinction at this juncture. A biblical false prophet—that's what they are really getting at—was not a believer. A biblical false prophet was a servant of the devil attempting to lead people away from the truth. You will find that in Exodus and Deuteronomy: "He hath spoken for the purpose of turning you away from the Lord your God." It's a prime characteristic of a biblical false prophet in the Scripture. You don't have a believer on your hands, you've got an unbeliever. And this person is deceiving the church.

Mrs. White, in my opinion, made false statements. She misused what she claimed was the prophetic gift she had. I believe this, in certain instances. But if you're going to try to say that makes Ellen White the same as the false prophecy prohibited in Exodus and Deuteronomy, then you have to demonstrate that Ellen White was an unbeliever and that it was a deliberate and willful perversion of truth regarding salvation and revelation. That's a very fine line.

(Concluded on Page 28)

## *This is the perfect cultic mentality — circular, self-authenticating, experiential, no basis in objective fact.*

resolve this issue," and "Brothers, we've got to sit down and talk." After the brothers sit down and talk and the Scripture speaks on the subject, they go right ahead and dis-fellowship him. I mean, this is not scriptural. So, I am not criticizing the denomination as a Baptist. I am criticizing the things that ought to be criticized as a member of the body of

Charles Russell hold to the foundations of the gospel? Did Charles Russell promulgate the things of Christianity and stand in their defense? No. Did Ellen White? Yes. Therefore, though she committed the same crime he did, I cannot judge her on the same basis I am going to judge Charles Russell. She is a Christian who committed a sin. That should

## Another verdict . . .

Continued from Page 6

by focusing on a narrow, legal definition of plagiarism, led readers to believe that a problem had been solved when the issues that do matter — ethics, inspiration-revelation, authority — have not even been seriously addressed.

1. Review 2-4-82, p. 3, "Adventists and Litigation," Neal Wilson.
2. Review 9-17-81, p. 13, "This work is of God or it is not"; Page 7 of a reprint of articles from this issue of the Review. Reprint titled, "Was Ellen G. White a Plagiarist?"
3. Alexander Lindey, *Plagiarism and Originality* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974 reprint of New York: Harper & Brother, 1952), p. 232.
4. Lindey, p. 2 (emphasis supplied).
5. *Emerson vs Davies et al.* (1845) 8 Fed. Case 615, 624.
6. Lindey, p. 7.
7. Review 9-17-81, pp. 5-6; reprint, pp. 4-5 (emphasis supplied).
8. "The Truth About The White Lie," *Ministry* insert, August 1982, p. 2. The document was prepared by the White Estate staff in cooperation with the Biblical Research Institute and the Ministerial Association of the General Conference. Hereinafter, *Ministry* insert.
9. See Douglas Hackleman, "G.C. Committee Studies Ellen White's Sources," *Spectrum* vol. 10, no. 4 (March 1980) p. 9.
10. Vincent L. Ramik, "Memorandum of Law, Literary Property Rights 1790-1915," August 14, 1981, p. 3.
11. Ramik, p. 7.
12. *Emerson*, p. 625.
13. *Healdsburg Enterprise*, March 20, 1889, "Is Mrs. White a Plagiarist?" p. 1.
14. Ron Graybill, "E.G. White's Literary Work: An Update," an edited and annotated transcript of presentations made November 15-19, 1981, at the morning worship services of the General Conference, p. 5. Available through the White Estate.
15. Warren H. Johns, "Ellen White: Prophet or Plagiarist?" *Ministry*, June 1982, p. 13.
16. Ramik, p. 5.
17. *Farmer vs Elstner* (1888) 33F. 494, 496.
18. *Farmer*, p. 497.
19. *Farmer*, p. 497.

## Martin Interview

Continued from Page 24

Of course, technically, I would have to say that the person who prophesies in the name of God and turns out to be wrong, has prophesied falsely. You have to say that. But they want to go further than that. They want to make Mrs. White a biblical false prophet which means she is not a Christian. I cannot endorse that.

**CURRENTS:** I don't think anyone familiar with the history would deny she felt she was right and felt she had some kind of mission to fulfill. In that sense I don't think anyone would attempt to say she was a false prophet,

who has fallen into a sin and is a believer, or is it a person who is a total unbeliever? That's your biblical part—deliberately attempting to lead people away from God.

**CURRENTS:** I find among disenchanted Adventists more of the charge that she was a fraud than that she was a false prophet.

**MARTIN:** Well, considering that 90% of her writings allegedly have been tainted by secular or religious sources, even if it was good material, one does get quite suspicious of her ethics and of her genuine commitment to truth.

**CURRENTS:** What about Mrs. White's view of the atonement—that it wasn't completed until 1844? Doesn't that fall under the category you are talking about?

**MARTIN:** The doctrine of the incomplete atonement is heretical. It was later changed into a modified Armenian device with the investigative judgment and was nothing more than a poor face-saving technique—as Dr. Barnhouse pointed out to Dr. Froom, to his great chagrin. It was just a way out of a nasty situation. She really bought the idea that this was the proper interpretation of Hebrews. She believed it. She was wrong. The people around her were wrong. She thought God had shown this to her because, I think, she tried to imbue a lot of her statements and doctrines with the divine seal of authority to get people to pay attention to her. Yes, I think she did that and I think that was sinful. However, I don't believe the intent of Mrs. White, in anything she taught, was to dishonor Christ or to turn against the gospel as she understood it.

**CURRENTS:** It would seem that the Christian has a lot of leeway in what he believes; and if there are some mistakes in his viewpoint, in some things he does. . . .

**MARTIN:** That doesn't make him a non-Christian. It makes him a Christian—uninformed, ignorant, or sinful; but still a redeemed person. Paul says, "Mark has forsaken me; Demetrius has loved this world." Does he send them off to hell? The man in I Corinthians 5, did he send him to hell? No. I therefore think Christians are capable of terribly stupid acts and statements, even dishonest and sinful acts. But they are also

## PRINTED MATTER

### Book Review

*The White Truth* by John J. Robertson.  
Pacific Press Publishing Association  
Mountain View, Calif., 1982.

The only commendatory description of John Robertson's *The White Truth* known to *Currents* was written by Pacific Press representative W. Paul Turpel in a promotional letter addressed to North American local conference presidents and Adventist Book Center managers, about a month and a half before the book's publication:

*In answer to many prayers, the administration of Southeastern felt so keenly about preparing a book documenting truth which even the greatest skeptic could not refute, they relieved John [Robertson] of his responsibilities until the book could be researched further and written.*

*The manuscript arrived this past week. My brethren, it is a masterpiece . . . In 27 years of reading manuscripts I did something never done before. I read it word for word twice. (19 October 1981)*

Is it any wonder that the Pacific Press is \$8 million in debt?

Probably the best thing about *The White Truth* is its brevity. It is an unabashed exhibit of apologetic boilerplate in which the desired conclusion is presupposed from the outset. Union College Division of Humanities chairman H. Ward Hill contemplated the negative potential of such tail-chasing logic:

*Robertson's approach will hardly be convincing to those who are not already firm believers in Mrs. White's prophetic gift . . . And should they drift into a somewhat cynical mood, they would most likely feel that a more suitable title for The White Truth would simply be The White Wash!*

Two examples of Robertson's special pleading and question begging defense involve the questions whether Ellen White ever admitted source dependence, and whether she might have been guilty of copyright infringement under 19th century law.

Robertson spends several pages attempting to convince readers that the preface to *The Great Controversy* contains an open, honest admission of all occasions of Mrs. White's unacknowledged source utilization. A year later Robertson was still convinced: "Yes, the introduction to *The Great Controversy* covers that in rather general terms, but it does cover it."

That is the kind of "White Truth" stretching by Robertson that destroys the integrity of his defense. *The Great Controversy* preface does admit that "in some cases . . . historian[s]'s . . . words have been quoted" (emphasis supplied). But there is no reference whatever to paraphrasing, which makes up almost the entire book. Also, *The Great Controversy* preface allows that "similar use

## If what she says infallibly interprets the Scriptures . . . How is it that we test her infallibility?

in the sense you just described.

**MARTIN:** I am just talking about people who have left the denomination and people who are hostile to Adventism generally. They are picking this line up and I am getting flack on the subject of false prophets. So I have to be very careful when I talk about a false prophet. We do admit that anyone who says something in the name of God, and it doesn't come to pass, is prophesying falsely. But there is a deeper level to this. Is it a person

capable of repenting. That's what the General Conference should be doing right now, repenting. Repenting of these things and saying, "We just cannot sustain this any longer. The church is built on Christ, not on Mrs. White or her prophetic gift, or the revenue generated from her resources."

**CURRENTS:** Three Seventh-day Adventists will have to repent for keeping you from your lunch if we don't thank you right now and get out of your hair.

has occasionally been made" of the Adventist pioneers' published works (emphasis supplied). Only *The Great Controversy* is referred to in *The Great Controversy's* preface; the existence of source quotations is minimized ("in some cases," "occasionally"); and paraphrasing goes unmentioned.

Robertson stretches credulity to the snapping point when he insists that *The Great Controversy* preface is an open, candid admission by Mrs. White of her source requisitions used in testimonies, articles, books, sermons, and visions from 1845 to 1915. Besides, the weight of evidence suggests that Ellen White did not write the introduction to *The Great Controversy*.

Battle Creek Church head Elder George Amadon, claimed intimate friendship with James and Ellen White "since the summer of 1853," "having been prominently con-

## *A more suitable title for The White Truth would simply be The White Wash!*

nected with the Review and Herald from 1853 to the time of its destruction by fire." He wrote to the *Battle Creek Daily Journal* in 1907, defending Mrs. White on a related point:

*Mrs. White does not write the prefaces to her books, she is not a proof reader, and much of the work on her numerous volumes is done by literary helpers.*

Robertson could have saved the church the several tens of thousands of dollars it spent on a Catholic copyright attorney's opinion that "there simply is no case" for believing that Mrs. White might have been guilty of plagiarism (copyright infringement) under 19th century legal canons. His next door neighbor, he tells readers, is "a respected judge of our city" who just happened to be interested in 19th century plagiarism law himself and provided Robertson with a "not guilty" verdict—for free.

How reduced would have been the impact of Robertson's conversation with the judge regarding Ellen White's plagiarism guilt if he had told readers his neighbor was Seventh-day Adventist Riverside Municipal Court Judge Robert Macomber?

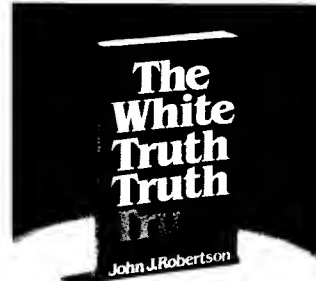
Note *Patriarchs and Prophets* page 309:

*All intentional overstatement, every hint or insinuation calculated to convey an erroneous or exaggerated impression, even the statement of facts in such a manner as to mislead, is falsehood . . . Even the intentional suppression of truth . . . is a violation of the ninth commandment.*

That pointed statement pronounces a judgment on the methods of defending Mrs. White employed by the author of *The White Truth*, which, by the way, it is not.

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